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Architectural Research Consortium - Visual Quality Research

The Culture & Branding Implied by the Design of a Senior Housing Campus

Introduction

Many senior housing organizations spend significant amounts of time, energy and expense trying to support and improve the quality of their reputations. Part of that effort is focused on the experience of the senior campus, itself. This includes the quality of the site, the quality of the architecture and the feelings that both engender.

Yet most senior campuses have never measured the value of either site or buildings in establishing and supporting their branding and culture.

ARC is now developing architecture's first design research program related to the measurement of the perception of culture and quality which is conveyed by the site and buildings that are the architectural experience of the residents, staff, visitors, family and benefactors of senior campus institutions.

Rationale

Most senior campuses are constantly facing the need to make decisions about design related to their campus. And many institutions are focused on retaining 'specialized' senior housing architects to take on their projects and to give their campuses more credibility and better branding. Yet most campuses exhibit a combination of traditional and period architecture that has never been formally intended to be a coherent experience of culture or branding.

In many cases, when looking back over the past 50 years of additions to a campus, it's not difficult to see which buildings and site work are no longer conveying any positive cultural messages. And sometimes, these campuses tear down buildings that are structurally sound but poor in design. As new buildings are being designed, sustainability is now a central focus, yet many organizations don't realize that the LEED program is not about occupancy quality or building quality, but it is rather about energy efficiency and sustainable materials; a LEED building is often not a good building.

ARC, the first organized architectural research collaboration in the United States, is interested in developing a focus on measuring the institutional culture implied by the senior campus, so that senior organizations have an opportunity to:

1. Define their cultural response via Perceptual Branding
2. Understand how their campus supports that branding intent
3. Have access to tools that can measure any proposed building for its adherence to that branding

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4. Develop a program for design defined by that branding and benchmarked against some of the best senior campuses and buildings nationwide.

The Research Process

The process that is employed to develop this background information is based on two decades of R & D on process development. The process is generally as follows:

1. Meet to discuss the cultural definition of the organization that is currently behind the efforts to improve the campus identity.
2. Develop a vocabulary of common language semantics that can be used to measure subjective responses to the campus experience. This is not an opinion-based process but is rather based on psychological and market research methods of quantitative subjective research. This process measures the emotional and associative response of subjects to viewing experiences.
3. Discuss the constituencies involved with the organization and the secondary benefit of their inclusion, in addition to residents and staff, in this research.
4. Prepare a study of the campus and a set number of specific buildings that will measure the cultural impact of the campus, as a whole, and will measure specific buildings for their exterior architectural impact. Compare these buildings with other examples of senior buildings.
5. Provide a report on the correlation between the campus and the branding, which will begin to show the connections and the discrepancies that are part of the ongoing experience of residents, staff and visitors to the campus.

Further Research Based on Initial Study

After this first study is undertaken, further studies may be done focusing more on the details of the senior campus, and studies can be constructed as part of any building project to assist in selecting architects and directing performance based designs that will effectively meet the cultural standards of the campus.

Summary

Most senior housing organizations do not have a well-established method of measuring the success of their new and renovated buildings, or changes to their site. This ARC program is intended to provide these institutions with a method of better understanding the cultural impact of their buildings and site on their organization, and to be the first step in developing a better framework for achieving predictable results in the use of buildings as cultural support for the mission of the organization.